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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses an analysis of cross-cultural discourse within the realm of business and economic informational texts. The study is based on the findings of Michael Clyne, who analyzed the organization of linguistic and sociological texts written by English and German speakers, for academic purposes. The paper outlines the premise and the results of Clyne's research and attempts to apply his findings to contrastive analysis of business and economics informational texts in German and English taken from two periodicals. The analyses conducted indicate the existing differences between English and German written discourse within the realm of business and economics informational texts. It is suggested that it is necessary to go beyond this level of cross-cultural discourse analysis and to consider the implications the findings have on the teaching of reading and writing, especially in courses of languages for special purposes. (JL)

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Cross-Cultural Discourse Analysis and Business/Economics Informational Texts

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This paper addresses an analysis of cross-cultural discourse within the realm of business and economics informational texts. It is based on findings by Michael Clyne (Monash University, Clayton, Australia) who analyzed the organization of linguistic and sociological texts for academic purposes written by English and German speakers.[1] After outlining his premise and the results of his research, I will attempt to apply his findings to a contrastive analysis of business and economics informational texts in German and English taken from *Wirtschaftswoche* and *Business Week*.

Michael Clyne had observed that differences in discourse patterns "sometimes operate as a barrier to the exchange of scholarship between two related cultures" (Clyne 211) Therefore, he undertook a cross-cultural text analysis of a large corpus of German and English academic texts.

He concentrated on broader organizational aspects of discourse, and put stress on coherence. He applied a top-to-bottom analysis, i.e. he went down from broader discourse structures to grammatical (lower-level) ones. For each text the following analyses were carried out, all of which concern linearization:

1) Hierarchy of text:

   a) Which macropropositions are dependent on which others? Clyne defines macropropositions as superordinated propositions which summarize the arguments of a number of (other) propositions in the text. (Clyne 218) They represent the intended meaning of that part of the text.

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[1]Michael Clyne, "Cultural differences in the organization of academic texts," Journal of Pragmatics 11 (1987): 211-247.

b) Is there more discourse subordination or discourse co-ordination?

2) Dynamics of the text:

a) How is the text developed in terms of a main argument and subsidiary arguments?

b) How is the reader informed about the development and helped to understand the text?

3) Symmetry:

a) How long are the various sections of the text in comparison?

b) How long are the text segments containing different macropropositions?

c) Are they marked discrepancies in their length?

d) Are data (and quotations) embedded in the text or more loosely attached?

4) Uniformity:

a) Are parallel text segments, i.e.sections with parallel content, structured in the same order or according to the same conventions? (Clyne 218)

Further aspects of his study of texts by English and German speakers include linearity and digressiveness, placement of definitions, their presence or absence, and positioning of topic sentences.

From Clyne's research, the following have emerged as tendencies in academic texts:

1) Linearity: Texts by both English and German speakers are more or less linear. But more texts by German speakers than

by English speakers have shown major digressions. A text is regarded as digressive if

a) some propositions are not dependent on the overarching proposition (macroproposition) of the section of the text in which they are situated;

b) some propositions do not follow the macroproposition on which they depend, and/or

c) some text segments are inserted inside another topic segment on a different topic.

2) Symmetry: There is a greater tendency to asymmetry in the German texts in both textual and propositional balance. A text is deemed to be characterized by 'textual asymmetry' if some sections of the paper are much longer than others and by 'propositional asymmetry' if there is an imbalance in the length of related propositions branching from the same macroproposition. It also needs to be mentioned that the texts by German speakers have a much higher lexical density (average number of words per macroproposition) than those by English speakers.

3) Hierarchy: The texts written by Germans exhibit more subordination at the discourse level in the hierarchy of propositions than do those written by English speakers.

4) Digression in German: German texts may be 'digressive', either because digression has a function in the text, or because they are not well-planned texts, or a combination of the two reasons. The main functions of 'digression' in German are to provide theory, ideology, 'qualification' of additional

information, or to enter into polemic with another author. This is done in the form of a longer or shorter *Exkurs*. When digressions with such functions are very long, as they often are, they contribute to textual asymmetry.

5) Digression in English: about 65% of the digressive English texts by English speakers result from faulty planning, sometimes from an unsuccessful attempt at conciseness.

6) Discontinuity: Texts by German speakers are more likely to be characterized by discontinuity, i.e. leaving an argument in mid-air and starting a new one. Such features become more conspicuous in the absence of advance organizers.

7) Advance organizers: English-educated scholars are more likely than German-educated colleagues to use advance organizers which explain the path and organization of a paper, and to place them at the start of it. They sometimes mark digressions [I will now digress ...; Let us briefly digress ...].

So, even if the paper of an English-educated author is not quite linear, people know what to expect and it may be easier to understand. Where the advance organizers are given by a German author, they are often in an obscure location.

8) Definition: Where a main term is explained, which is more probable in a text by an English speaker than in one by a German, this is far more likely to take place at or near the start of the text if the author is English-educated. The definition process in German papers is seen as developing in the course of the whole text.

9) Sentence types: The occurrence of topic and other sentences at the beginning of a paragraph depends partly on the function of the text. However, English-educated scholars (especially Americans) seem more likely to use topic sentences than do the German-educated. The introductory sentence in a paragraph written by a German-educated scholar is far more likely to be a bridge sentence (referring back to the previous paragraph or another paragraph).

10) Data integration: Examples, statistics and quotations are less likely to be embedded in the text by German-speaking scholars, who will sometimes present them in unintegrated fashion, e.g. at the end, in unexplained chunks or table or in footnotes. Clyne notes that footnotes sometimes facilitate a compromise between a more digressive and a more linear text. (233)

All these phenomena contribute to the relative differences in linearity.

The question emerging is whether these patterns are characteristic of the sub-culture of one or other discipline? From the text corpus Clyne analyzed, he only found that there is more discourse subordination in sociological texts, and a greater tendency to employ advance organizers earlier in sociological texts than in linguistic ones. (235)

The issue at hand now is whether and if so how Clyne's findings can be used as a foundation for the discussion of texts from the area of business and economics. In an attempt to apply his findings on academic texts to a contrastive analysis of business and

economics informational texts in German and English, two texts were chosen, one each from *Wirtschaftswoche* [2] and *Business Week*.[3] The fact that they dealt with the same issue was more a matter of coincidence than intention.

For their analyses, concentration was put on the following criteria: hierarchy, symmetry/asymmetry, continuity/discontinuity, advance organizers, sentence types, definitions/abbreviations, and data integration.

1) Hierarchy. Representations of the underlying outline of each text are necessary in order to gain an overview of the texts' dependency relationships.

The German text shows the following organizational outline:

# OF LINES		
	I.	**Introduction**
12		I.1. Lead-in: quote Theo Waigel
7		I.2. Thesis statement
	II.	**Criteria for admission**
14		II.1. Hurdles/Impositions
17		II.1.1. Examples
32		II.2. Timing of monetary union; readiness of member countries
6		II.2.1. Belgium and Holland
32		II.2.2. Ireland
8		II.2.3. Spain, Portugal, Italy
		II.2.4. Greece
		II.2.5. Southern Europe
8		II.2.5.1. Summary
1		II.2.5.2. Conclusion
1		II.2.5.3. Suggestion to change criteria for admission (last sentence)

In comparison, the English text is organized as follows:

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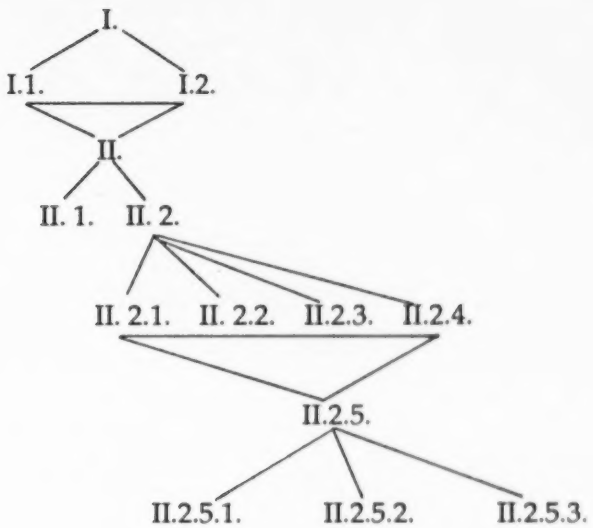
[2]Konrad Handschuch, "Teure Anpassung," Wirtschaftswoche 20 Dec 1991: 16-17.

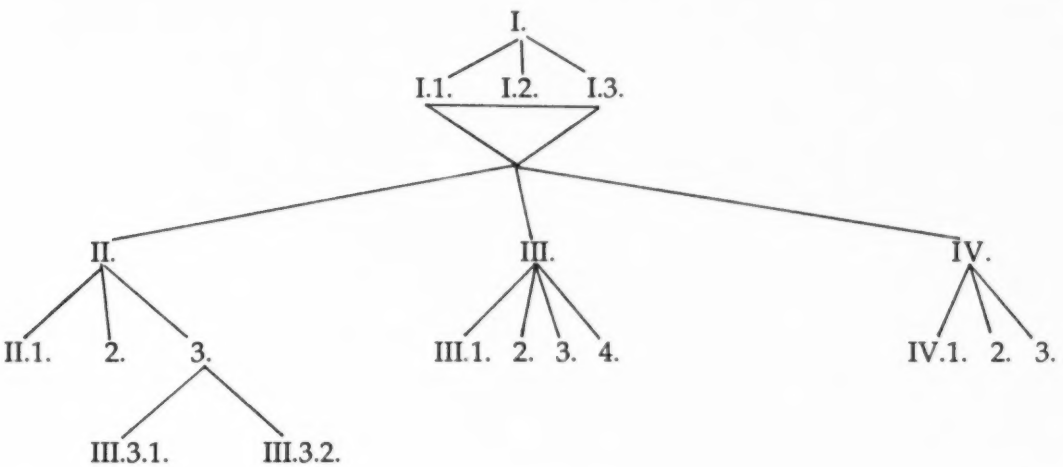
[3]John Templeman and Patrick Oster, "One big currency - and one big job ahead," Business Week 23 Dec 1991: 40-42.

# OF LINES		
	I.	**Introduction**
17		I.1. Lead-in: celebrations after official meeting Dec. 11, 1991
9		I.2. Thesis statement
11		I.3. Potentials of single currency (Theory)
	II.	**Pound drag**
15		II.1. Transitional sentence and examples: Denmark/Britain/The Netherlands
16		II.2. Existing EC monetary system vs. new set-up with European Central Bank
18		III.3. Industry: Rush to adapt; example banking industry
17		II.3.1. Banks and foreign exchange trading
14		II.3.2. Examples of banks who already adopted ECU
	III.	**Sea change**
13		III.1. Changes within stock market
13		III.2. Changes within bond market
16		III.3. Changes for manufacturers
18		III.4. Competition across Europe; price wars within Europe
	IV.	**Tough rules**
19		IV.1. Criteria to join monetary union
13		IV.2. Examples of "problematic" countries
1		IV.3. Conclusion (last sentence)

An even closer look at the content of the individual sections and paragraphs and their interrelationships lead to the following hierarchical structures of the two texts. These dependency relationships are best shown by tree diagrams. The German text showed discourse subordination: we notice a fairly linear development from one starting point, and the subsequent sections following the other directly and chronically.



The English text on the other hand shows discourse coordination: three main parts, and each with subdivisions.



2) Symmetry: A text is deemed to be characterized by 'textual asymmetry' if some sections are much longer than others, and by 'propositional asymmetry' if there is an imbalance in the length of related propositions branching from the same macroproposition. (Clyne 226) The counting of lines occupied by the individual sections, which is indicated by

the numbers written to the left of the representations of the outline above, revealed that the German text is characterized by textual and propositional asymmetry, while the English text showed more of a textual and propositional symmetry. At this point, the argument could be made to count sentences instead of lines in order to possibly take a more "scientific" approach to the issue at hand. However, this would ignore the fact that the established German writing style, whether the author is native German or not, calls for and lends itself to longer and more complex sentences while shorter sentences, and therefore more in number, are used in the English language.

3) Continuity/Discontinuity: This addresses the following question: How well linked are the paragraphs and therefore the entire text? Are there noticeable transitions? The analysis of both texts showed that the German text is not well and/or unsystematically linked, whereas the English text was well linked with noticeable transitions.

4) Advance organizers: Due to the length and complexity of academic papers, the method of using advance organizers such as *"Let us briefly digress to..."* or *"I will now digress..."* is more needed and applicable as compared to informational texts. Therefore, it seems more suitable to examine the use of discourse markers. The German text did not show as many discourse markers which gives the text more of an abrupt style. Examples for the discourse markers used are: *doch, danach, auch, ähnlich wie, neben*. The English text displayed a lot of discourse markers such as *like, but, now, in fact, other, similar, etc.*

5) Sentence types: Michael Clyne distinguishes between topic sentences and bridge sentences: topic sentences set the topic for the following paragraph, while bridge sentences refer back to the previous

paragraph or to another paragraph. (Clyne 232) Both texts show topic as well as bridge sentences at the beginnings of a paragraph.

6) Definitions/Abbreviations: Neither the German nor the English text contained any definitions *per se*, although abbreviations could be regarded as such. In the German text, abbreviations are written out at their first usage followed by the abbreviations in parentheses; for example *Europäische Währungsunion (EWU)* and *Bruttoinlandsprodukt (BIP)*. In the English text, on the other hand, the abbreviations are embedded in the text, for example *"the new European currency unit, or ECU, has the potential ..."* (p. 40).

7) Data integration: The figures in the table contained in the German text are not explained or even referred to, and the table is not integrated other than by center placement in order to achieve a visual effect and thus the attention of the reader. The English text refers to the chart, and chart is explained in the text.

It was shown that Michael Clyne's criteria for the analysis of academic texts can be applied to a cross-cultural analysis of business and economics informational texts.

The analyses conducted so far only indicate the existing differences between English and German written discourse within the realm of business and economics informational texts. Raising this issue needs to be pursued, and it is imperative for the cultural basis of discourse structures to be recognized and for variant patterns to be appreciated and respected. Furthermore, we have to go beyond this level of cross-cultural discourse analysis and think of the implications these findings have on the teaching of reading and writing especially in courses of languages for special purposes.